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ABSTRACT

One problem with state speech organizations is the lack of common sense sometimes shown in selecting the geographic locations of the conventions. The best solution is for the conference to be held in the middle of the state, so that attendance will be greater and representation more even-handed. Some have suggested the elimination of state organizations, but in fact they serve important purposes, such as tracking alumni achievements and maintaining institutional needs for speech departments. Further, the state speech organizations provide the main means of contact with other members of the communication field; they foster cohesion. Finally, they are one of the main vehicles by which communication professors publish their research. What could be improved about these organizations is the regular communication among the members. Emerging technologies such as teleconferencing or satellite downlinks are not that expensive to use. Association funds could be set aside for regular interactions among member institutions and departments. The point is that since the field in question is, in its broadest sense, about communication, it makes sense to stay on top of the latest technological developments. (TB)

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"Preserving the State Speech Association: A Noble Idea Whose Time Has Passed?" (States Advisory Council)

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As a member of this panel, I will be fair in discussing the issue at hand. However, I feel it is important to give a short personal perspective on the long-term viability of state speech organizations. Indeed, the term "speech" as used in the title of this program could potentially be debated by fellow Speech Communication Association members hung up on the importance of our institutional title. The sometimes heated and humorous debates in previous issues of Spectra point out this controversy. A future name change to "American Communication Association" appears to be inevitable. Despite this, it is ironic that the 1993-94 Speech Communication Association Directory lists 21 state organizations with "speech" in their titles.

One problem with speech organizations can be a lack of common sense by some members in selecting the geographic locations of state conventions. A friend of mine attended a conference last year which was held in the western section of his state. Many organization members from central, eastern and southern regions did not attend, claiming distance to the conference as the main factor for not coming. It was both too far and too expensive to justify their attendance.

What happened as a result? One problem was ensuring a quorum for the organizational business meeting. Those participants attending the conference en masse from single institutions could wield disproportionate power to make changes. Luckily, my friend

and others had the collective foresight to plan the 1993 conference in a central portion of his state. It was judged a major success.

Finances are a major consideration for speech, communication and theatre departments at state institutions. Money is a more acute problem in some states, California being the latest, where legislative budget cutbacks are gutting or eliminating departments. The increasing need for other state speech departments to justify their existence in times of stagnant or decreasing enrollment is also a concern. State associations can provide an invaluable network of information in these situations. Documenting the worth of our areas, in ways such as tracking alumni achievements and maintaining institutional needs for speech departments, are vital in ensuring our continued presence at colleges and universities.

As an assistant professor who teaches at an institution located in the southwest portion of my state, personal contacts with members of the Arkansas State Communication Association are minimal. While I do serve as an associate editor of the Journal of Communication Studies, a scholarly publication of the ASCA, my schedule is such that I rarely see fellow organizational members. Despite this, personal membership in the state association provides me with information and interaction, albeit impersonal, with scholars who share my interests.

Is it inconsistent that a member of a state speech association like myself spend most of his time removed from personal contact

with other members? In my case, the answer is no. I am the only member of my department who has an active role in the Arkansas State Communication Association. When a scholar such as myself is geographically removed from the center of association matters, other forms of communication are necessary to keep pace of state activities and events. Similarly, on a nationwide scale, most of our personal contact with the Speech Communication Association comes at national conventions. There is no hue and cry among our academic brothers and sisters that SCA be eliminated.

Each of the papers which are being presented as part of this panel, both pro and con, have considerable merit. It must be understood that different state associations have different policies with different areas of importance. However, my feeling is that state speech associations are necessary, among other reasons, to help foster a sense of cohesion for institutions. I believe we as scholars need state speech associations in order to share information with colleagues in varying aspects of education.

What could be improved is regular communication in state speech associations with institutional members located in varying geographic areas of large states. Emerging technologies such as teleconferencing or satellite downlinks are not that expensive to use. Association funds could be set aside for regular interactions with member institutions or departments. Computer networks and fax machines have already shown to be effective in relaying information

that telephones could not do alone. The point is that since our field is, in the broadest sense, communication, associations should stay current with equipment trends to ensure its members have ready access to data relevant to the discipline.

Many state associations also serve important roles in reviewing, editing and distributing refereed scholarly journals with significant findings for our peers and society as a whole. Elimination of state associations would bring about a realignment of journal writing and distribution. Would they be produced by an informal consortium of interested departments? Would they be distributed by flagship state universities? How would such journals be funded in tight fiscal times? The proposed elimination question falls flat on its face on these points alone. My experience with the Journal of Communication Studies has made me a better critic of mass media. The Arkansas State Communication Association, as others like it around the nation, serves an educational as well as a unifying role to its membership.

While the idea of eliminating state speech associations is a unique one to discuss, its viability is in serious question. Those of us at smaller, less-funded state institutions appreciate the opportunities that membership brings. There may have to be some organizational fine-tuning along the way to make some state speech associations more user-friendly to departments and faculty. In actuality, state speech associations are needed now more than ever.